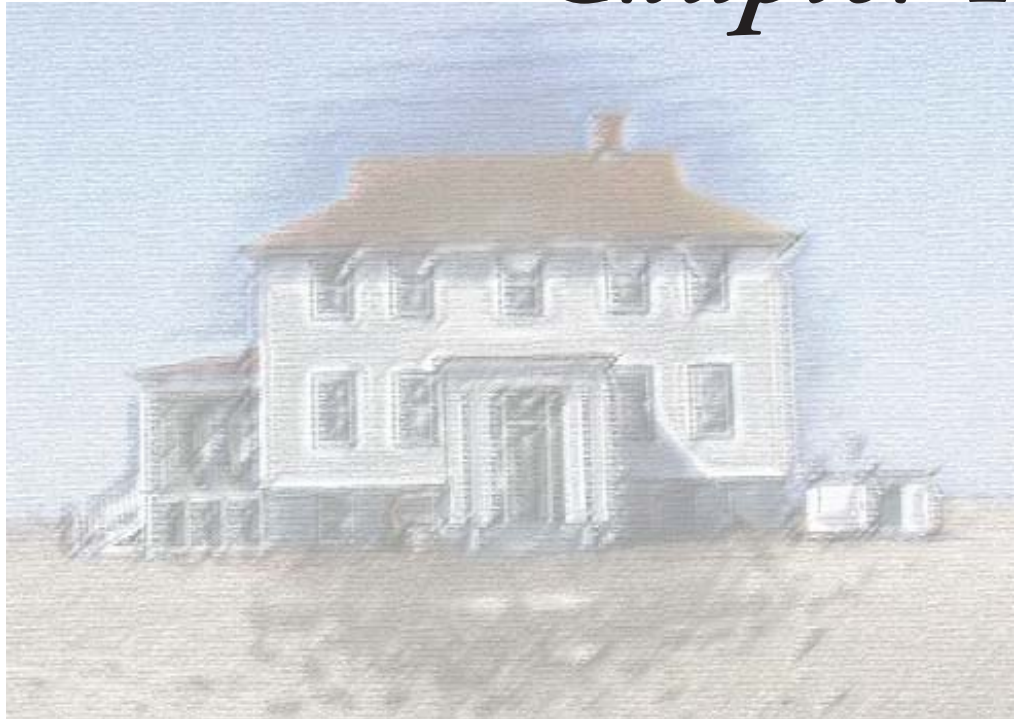


Chapter I



Purpose & Need for Action

Purpose of the Action
Need for the Action
History of the Coast Guard Station
Study Area & Political Context
Recent Studies & Relationship to Other Projects & Plans
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I. Purpose & Need for Action

A. Purpose of the Action

Assateague Island National Seashore (the park) is preparing this Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze alternatives relating to potential future uses and treatment of Assateague Beach Coast Guard Station (Station), a historic former Coast Guard facility, transferred to the National Park Service in 1967.

Since acquiring ownership, the Station has been used by the park as seasonal housing for temporary staff, to accommodate visiting researchers and other cooperators, for equipment and material storage, and as the site of occasional interpretive and educational activities. The park has not used the Station regularly as housing since 2002 due to outstanding maintenance and repair needs and recurring problems accessing the Station by land during the Piping Plover breeding season. It is still used to accommodate researchers and other cooperators for overnight stays and for general storage.

The Station, located at the southern end of the barrier island, was determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places on January 15, 1980 as a maritime life-rescue service property under criteria C-Design/Construction. In September 2004, the Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with the NPS that the cultural landscape associated with the Station was also eligible for the National Register.

B. Need for the Action

The 1982 general management plan for Assateague Island National Seashore called for the rehabilitation of the Station structures for adaptive use as residence, classroom for environmental education, storage and maintenance. The park has been relatively successful in maintaining the structures over time, however, the scope of needed repairs and the recurring costs of maintenance have steadily increased. The park seeks a long-term, sustainable solution and is reconsidering the GMP's recommendation for adaptive reuses. The park is evaluating ways in which the site can potentially be fully or partially financially self-sustaining.

There are two major factors that have made sustaining the Station a challenge for the park: a remote location and inadequate funding. From March 15 to August 31 the hook is restricted—to both vehicles and pedestrians—because of its intensive use by Piping Plovers for nesting and breeding. During this time, the Station is accessible by boat only. Such restricted access makes on-going park programs—interpretive, educational or scientific—more difficult and expensive. The funding shortfalls in the recent past (and for the foreseeable future) have prohibited the park from going beyond minimal level maintenance and pursuing comprehensive programs of repair and rehabilitation.

The resource conditions of the Station—station house, garage (original boathouse), boathouse, lookout tower and generator building—range from good to poor due to exposure to extreme weather conditions and lack of repairs. It is, however, considered to have “excellent historical integrity” according to the draft Historic

Since acquiring ownership, the Station has been used by the park as seasonal housing for temporary staff, to accommodate visiting researchers and other cooperators...



The Boat House.



New Boat House under construction, 1939.

Structure Report completed in 2000 and “the overall landscape appears to retain a moderate to high degree of integrity from the period of significance” as stated in the 2004 Assateague Beach Coast Guard Station Cultural Landscape Inventory report.

C. History of the Coast Guard Station

In 1874 Congress called for the establishment of eight life-saving stations along the Atlantic Coast between Cape Henlopen, Delaware and Cape Charles, Virginia. The original Assateague Beach Life-Saving Station was built on what used to be the southern shoreline of Assateague Island near the lighthouse.

In 1915 the US Life Saving Service merged with the US Revenue Cutter Service to create the US Coast Guard. The Assateague Beach Life-Saving Station continued to operate for several years but the effects of wind and currents were adding land to form a hook, eventually creating Tom’s Cove. Year after year, the station stood further from the Atlantic Ocean until the 1920’s when it was decided that a new station was needed on the ocean side of the island. In 1922 the life-saving station was abandoned.

In 1922 US Coast Guard Station 150 was built on the southeast corner of Assateague Island, across from Tom’s Cove and the site of the old station. The Station was sited on a 5.32-acre strip of land that was 100 feet wide and which ran from the cove to the Atlantic Ocean. Initially, the Station was comprised of a station house built in the “Chatham” style in the center of the site and a boathouse to its south. The Station was designed by the last official architect of the Life Saving Service, Victor Mendleheff. A lookout tower was then built between the two structures.

The Station is a two-story, five bay, plainly detailed building with a gable-on-hip roof and a columned hip-roof entrance porch. The boathouse was a simple, rectangular one room building with a hip roof and two double-wide “boat doors” facing the Atlantic Ocean to the south. The lookout tower is a small, square, hip-roof structure perched on top of a steel girder base. In the late 1930s, a one-story covered porch was added to the Station house along the west elevation and the lookout tower was raised to three stories.

Because of the effects of shifting sands and the use of larger heavier boats, a new boathouse was constructed in 1938-1939 on the shore of Tom’s Cove, north of the Station house. The new boathouse is larger with a more elegant design than the 1922 boathouse, reflecting the “Classical Revival” architectural style that was in vogue then. The new boathouse has a rectangular hip roof with dormers, a porticoed entrance porch on the south elevation and three wide boat doors on the north elevation that face the cove. Connected to the boathouse are catwalks and a wharf that extends 600’ into the water. There is a T-shaped dock at the north end and a 220’ breakwater attached to the east side of the wharf. A wooden walkway connects the boathouse to the station house. Upon completion, the 1922 boathouse was converted into a garage.

The crew performed various duties, chores and drills such as recording sunrise and



The Lifesaving Station House in 1874. NPS Photo.



NPS Photo.

sunset and weather and surf conditions throughout the day; daily inspections of the buildings, grounds and equipment; and practicing drills such as the international code of signals, motor boat laws, rules of the road, general service signals, resurrection drills, wigwag practice and the semaphore (signaling at a distance from a pole) drill.

With modernization of navigation equipment, weather forecasting and safety equipment on boats, the demand for the traditional role of life-saving had declined and new duties were assigned to the Coast Guard such as enforcement of the 1936 Migratory Bird Treaty Act. In 1939 the Lighthouse Service merged with the Coast Guard and the crew of the station eventually took over responsibility of Assateague Light

In 1941, the Coast Guard was ordered to operate as part of the Navy with responsibility for port security during World War II. The station crew began anti-submarine, aircraft and beach patrol duties using truck, jeep and horse. As many as 60 men were added to the station, housed in the station house as well as in temporary elevated housing located south of the garage (1943 photograph). In 1946, the Coast Guard was returned to the US Treasury Department with the end of the war.

Additional modernization of the Coast Guard further diminished the role of stations such as Assateague. Aircraft and helicopter rescues proved to be effective and efficient as early as the 1950's and were used in floods and the 1962 storm known as the Ash Wednesday Nor'easter. This storm was pivotal to the creation of the Assateague Island National Seashore with 32 out of 50 homes on the island destroyed. Assateague had proven to be better suited as a recreation and wildlife refuge area than as a site for residential and commercial development. The Station sustained considerable damage and flooding and had to be evacuated.

In the early 1960's the USFWS, perhaps at the direction of the Coast Guard, created man-made vegetated dunes with sand fences to protect the station from future storms. By the early 1970's, maintaining the dunes became too expensive and the NPS encouraged a more natural dune environment. Although not maintained, the dunes can still be seen today and are considered an integral part of the landscape.

On January 15, 1967, the Assateague Beach Coast Guard Station was decommissioned and the NPS took possession of the site, making it part of the Assateague Island National Seashore. The structures remaining today include the Station house, garage (original boathouse), lookout tower, a 1959 generator house and the 1939 boathouse with its surrounding walkways, launchway and wharf.

D. Study Area & Political Context

The Station is part of Assateague Island National Seashore—a National Park Service site—and is located in the second congressional district of Virginia in Accomack County. The surrounding lands are part of the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge under the administration of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, while the adjacent waters are under the administrative jurisdiction of the National Park Service. The nearest town is Chincoteague, Virginia



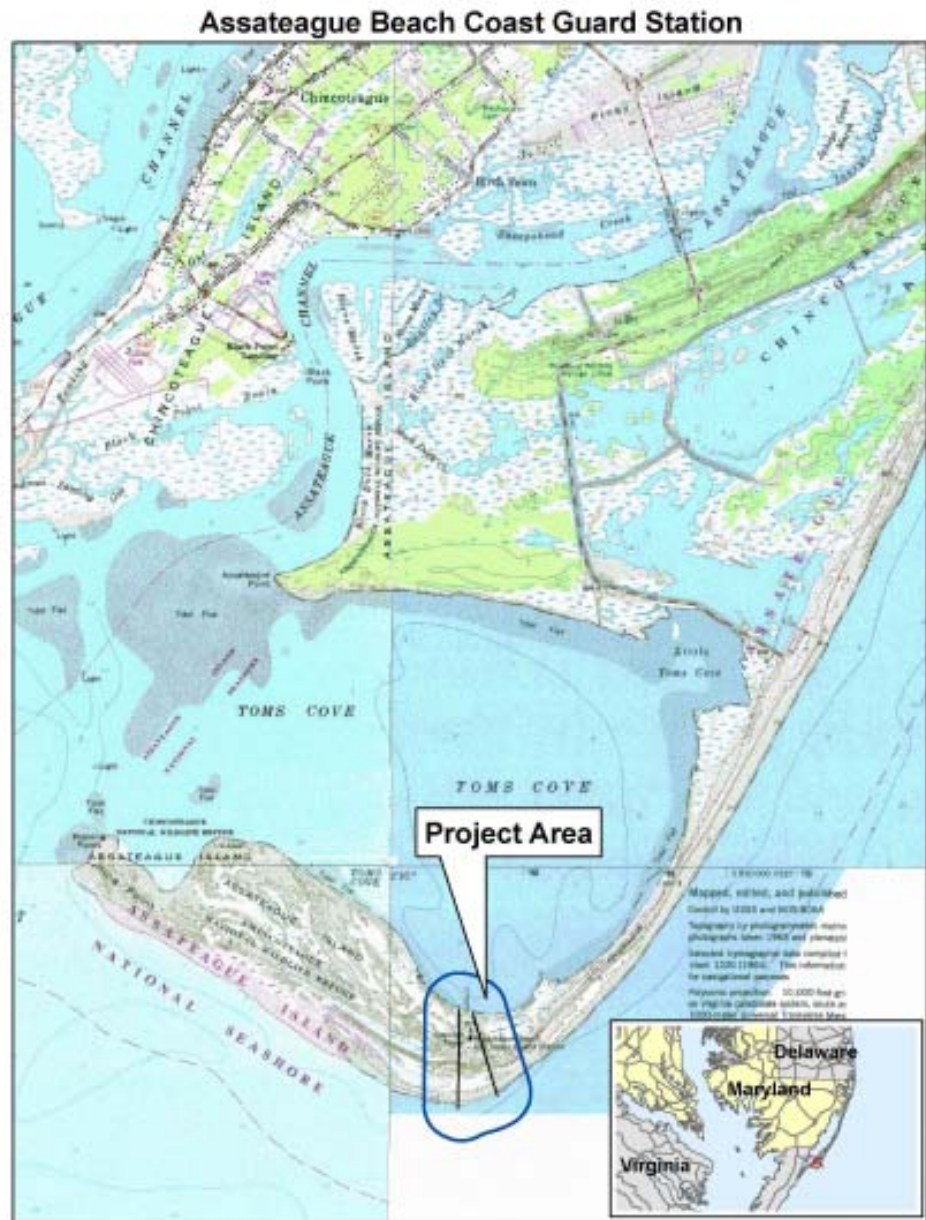
Chief Massey & Crew.

Francis Massey.



Coast Guard Station and Tower.

CLI Report, NPS.



Assateague Island National Seashore considers the Town of Chincoteague and the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge to be partners in park management, with the shared goals of maintaining, preserving and protecting the environmental and cultural heritage and resources of the area.

The study area for this EA is the southern hook of Assateague Island.

E. Recent Studies & Relationship to Other Projects & Plans

Information on natural and cultural resources, history and potential alternative adaptive uses of the Coast Guard Station for this EA was derived from the following studies and reports:

Assateague Island National Seashore General Management Plan. June 1982. National Park Service.

The GMP set forth long-term management guidelines for natural and cultural resources, visitor use, facilities development and compliance.

Final Environmental Impact Assessment for the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge Master Plan. August, 1992. US Fish & Wildlife Service.

The EIS presents a comprehensive land use plan setting forth long-term objectives for resource management and public use of the refuge based on an analysis of four alternatives. The preferred alternative combines management actions which address both wildlife and public use needs, with an emphasis on wildlife and ecosystem protection.

The Assateague Beach Coast Guard Station, Station House, Garage and Boathouse: Historic Structure Report. Draft, September 2000. National Park Service.

An abbreviated Level II report prepared by the Building Conservation Branch (BCB) of the NPS. The report includes historical and archival research and physical and photographic documentation of the structures. No fabric analysis (paint, mortar, etc.) was conducted.

Memorandum: Biological Opinion on Monitoring and Predator Control within Piping Plover Nesting Areas of the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, Virginia. April 11, 2001. US Fish & Wildlife Service.

Memorandum is in response to continued monitoring, nest enclosure and predator control activities for the piping plover within the refuge as well as off-road vehicle use by both USF&WS and NPS.

Assateague Beach Coast Guard Station, National Park Service Cultural Landscapes Inventory, Assateague Island National Seashore. National Park Service Northeast Region, 2004.

The CLI includes historical research of secondary sources, documentation and on-site landscape investigations. The inventory identifies and documents each landscape's location, physical development, significance, National Register of Historic Places eligibility, condition, integrity and current management. The report was submitted to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, which confirmed that the landscape was eligible for the National Register.

Market Feasibility Study of Station House, Boat House and Garage. March, 2002. National Park Service.

Analysis to evaluate the economic feasibility and compatibility with park management objectives of selected types of potential adaptive uses for the Station.

Scope of Work for the Abatement of Exterior Lead Paint, Repainting and Repairs – Fall 2004



Peeling paint on boat house.



Oral history project.



Public meeting, 8.5.03, Chincoteague Community Center



August, 2003 public meeting,
Chincoteague Community Center

The project will mitigate the environmental and any potential human health threats associated with the presence of lead-based exterior paint, and protect the physical integrity of the structures by repairing or replacing deteriorated components.

The project will remove (abate) exterior lead-based paint throughout the station complex, repaint most of the exteriors, repair roofs, and repair or replace damaged portions of the Station. The scope of work and contract specifications for the project were developed by park staff with the NPS Northeast Region Architectural Preservation Division.

Bibliographic and Oral History Resource Survey

The report includes an annotated resource list identifying sources and oral histories associated with the Assateague Beach Coast Guard Station. The survey identifies primary and secondary source materials associated with the site, and provides useful information for interpreting the cultural history and significance of the Station.

Energy Efficiency Improvements

The purpose of the proposed project is to improve the energy efficiency of the historic Assateague Beach Coast Guard Station House and provide emergency electrical service during power outages. The project includes replacement of major utilities (furnace, water heater) and kitchen appliances, retrofitting windows and doors with high efficiency glass, and the installation of additional attic insulation. Deteriorated components of doors and windows will be repaired or replaced. An electrical generator will be installed in the existing generator shed and a new fuel supply line run across the Station grounds.

Ongoing USFWS "Compatibility" Determination

The compatibility determination process is required by the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 (PL 105-57, October 9, 1997). This process is revisiting the 1994 evaluation of all public uses to evaluate their compatibility with the overall purpose of the Refuge. Increasing human populations mean more demands on natural areas like the Refuge for recreation. Public uses on all National Wildlife Refuges, including Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, are subject to review under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's compatibility regulations, which define a compatible use as "an allowable use which will not materially interfere with or detract from the purpose(s) for which the Refuge was established". The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has developed this concept as a means of determining the compatibility of proposed and existing uses on each National Wildlife Refuge.

F. Public Involvement

Public meetings were held at the park on Monday, August 4, 2003 at the Barrier Island Visitor Center located at the northern entrance to the Seashore in Maryland, and on Tuesday, August 5, 2003 at the Chincoteague Community Center in Chincoteague, Virginia. Both workshops were from 2:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. NPS staff were on hand to answer questions and display boards presented information on the resources and issues. Comment forms were available. In addition, the public used and continues to use regular mail and the internet to e-mail questions and comments.



Christine Gobrial, NPS

Issues and comments expressed included a broad range of desires from wanting the Station preserved and used, moving the Station; re-using the Station but without over-night accommodations; re-using the Station but for non-profit uses only such as for education and environmental research; using the Station as a recreational lodge. Other comments expressed a preference to see the Station complex removed or abandoned for financial and environmental reasons.

G. Impact Topics Addressed

Impact topics are resources of concern that could be affected, either beneficially or adversely, by the range of management alternatives. Impact topics were identified based upon Federal laws, regulations, Executive orders, NPS Management Policies, and from NPS knowledge of the resources present within the affected area. Chapter Three discusses the affected environment and the potential impacts of the alternatives on cultural and natural resources, the social and economic environment, park operations and administration and costs.

H. Impact Topics Eliminated from Further Analysis

The topics listed below would either not be affected or would be affected negligibly by the alternatives evaluated in this document. Therefore, these topics are briefly discussed in this section of the Environmental Assessment and then dismissed from further consideration or evaluation. Negligible impacts are impacts that are localized and immeasurable at the lowest level of detection.

1. Monuments & Commemorative Resources

There are no monuments or commemorative resources in the immediate vicinity of the Station.

2. Land Use

The Station is the only permanent structure on Toms Cove Hook, the southernmost area of Assateague Island. It is accessible only by foot, boat or ranger-escorted vehicle during Piping Plover nesting season, March 15 to August 31. The Station is in the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, which effectively prohibits any new structures or access roads.

Land use at the Station or in adjacent areas would not be altered as a result of any of the alternatives selected, therefore there are no anticipated land use impacts.

3. Prime & Unique Agricultural Lands

Prime farmland is farmland with the *best* combination of physical and chemical qualities to sustain a variety of crops—such as food, oilseed or trees—and can include farmland to forest land. Unique farmland is other than prime farmland and has *special* characteristics such as soil quality, location and growing season, for growing crops such as citrus. Both are treated and managed for high-yield production of high-value food and fiber crops.

No prime or unique farmlands exist in the study area.

*The park and refuge
are ideal places to
experience the sounds
of nature absent
human intrusions.*

4. Geology, Soils & Topography

None of the alternatives would have an impact on geology, soils or topography.

5. Soundscape

Natural soundscapes exist in the absence of human-caused sound and are the aggregate of all the natural sounds that occur in parks, together with the physical capacity for transmitting natural sounds. Natural sounds occur within and beyond the range of sounds that humans can perceive, and can be transmitted through air, water, or solid materials. (*NPS Management Policies 4.9, Soundscape Management, NPS 2001*).

The park and refuge are ideal places to experience the sounds of nature absent human intrusions. Toms Cove Hook is relatively isolated, with only authorized vehicle traffic, making the hook an ideal location for kayakers and other recreational boaters. None of the alternatives would change existing soundscape conditions.

6. Lightscapes/Night Sky

Natural lightscapes and night sky are natural resources that exist in the absence of human-caused light.

Recognizing the roles that light and dark periods and darkness play in natural resource processes and the evolution of species, the NPS seeks to preserve, to the greatest extent possible, natural darkness and other components of the natural lightscape in parks. (*Management Policies 4.10 Lightscape Management, NPS 2001*).

Alternatives A, C and D would have no impacts on the night sky; Alternative B would have a negligible impact on the night sky.

7. Air Quality

Clean Air Act, 1977 [P.L. 95-95; 91 Stat. 685]— The primary objective of the Clean Air Act is to establish federal standards for various pollutants and to provide for the regulation of polluting emissions via state implementation plans. In addition, the amendments are designed to prevent significant deterioration in certain areas where air quality exceeds national standards, and to provide for improved air quality in areas which do not meet federal standards known as “non-attainment” areas. There are three levels of classification: Class I areas receive the highest degree of protection, with only a small amount of certain kinds of additional air pollution allowed. Mandatory Class I areas were designated by Congress and include international parks, national wilderness areas or national memorial parks larger than 5,000 acres, or national parks larger than 6,000 acres, that were in existence (or authorized) on August 7, 1977. All other units of the National Park Service are Class II areas which are allowed only a moderate increase in certain air pollutants. No Class III areas—where a large amount of new air pollution would be allowed—were designated by Congress, but a process was established for redesignating Class II areas to more protective Class I or the less protective Class III status. Only states or Native American governing bodies have authority to redesignate areas.

Assateague Island National Seashore is classified as a Class II clean air area.

*Assateague Island
National Seashore is
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clean air area.*

Maximum allowable increases of sulfur dioxide, particulate matter and nitrogen oxides beyond baseline concentrations established for Class II areas are not and will not be exceeded by any of the actions under any of the alternatives in this document.

8. Wild & Scenic Rivers

Nationally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers are rivers that must be free flowing and possess an “outstandingly remarkable” geologic, historic, cultural, natural or recreational resource. There are no wild and scenic rivers in the study area.

9. Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898, Environmental Justice in Minority and Low-Income Populations—This executive order directs federal agencies to assess whether their actions have disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low income populations.

None of the alternatives would have an effect on any minority or low-income communities in the park’s region—no increase in development, traffic, noise or air pollution are associated with any of the alternatives.

10. Indian Trust Resources

Secretarial Order 3175 requires that any anticipated impacts to Indian trust resources from a proposed project or action by Department of Interior agencies be explicitly addressed in environmental documents. The federal Indian trust responsibility is a legally enforceable fiduciary obligation on the part of the United States to protect tribal lands, assets, resources, and treaty rights, and it represents a duty to carry out the mandates of federal law with respect to American Indian and Alaska Native tribes. There are no Indian Trust Resources located within Assateague Island National Seashore.

11. Ethnographic Resources

Ethnographic resources are the cultural and natural features of a park that are of significance to traditionally associated peoples. These peoples are the contemporary park neighbors and ethnic or occupational communities that have been associated with a park for two or more generations (40 years), and whose interests in the park’s resources began prior to the park’s establishment. Living peoples of many cultural backgrounds—American Indians, African Americans, Hispanics, Chinese Americans, Euro- Americans, and farmers, ranchers, and fishermen—may have a traditional association with a particular park. Some ethnographic resources might also be traditional cultural properties. A traditional cultural property (TCP) is one that is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places because of its association with cultural practices or beliefs of a living community.

Traditionally associated peoples generally differ as a group from other park visitors in that they typically assign significance to ethnographic resources—places closely linked with their own sense of purpose, existence as a community, and development as ethnically distinctive peoples. These places may be in urban or rural parks, and may support ceremonial activities or represent birthplaces of significant individuals, group origin sites, migration routes, or

The park recognizes the importance and significance of the Station to former members of the Coast Guard and their families, particularly those who served at the Station.

harvesting or collecting places.

The Station complex is considered an important cultural resource but does not qualify as an ethnographic resource based on the definition given by ethnographers above. The park recognizes the importance and significance of the Station to former members of the Coast Guard and their families, particularly those who served at the Station. Realizing the importance and value of capturing the stories and recollections that form the basis of this association, the park contracted with Kara and Richard Funk who specialize in Eastern Shore heritage preservation. The Funks located four individuals who served at the Station. With the Station as a backdrop, interviews were conducted with the men and professionally videoed. The video and associated background materials comprise an invaluable historical record for generations to come and are a permanent part of the park's collections and archives.

12. Library, Collections & Archives

The park houses its museum collections in the Resource Management Offices, located in the Maryland headquarters building. It consists of various objects and archived materials from the Station, none of which would be influenced by the proposed alternatives. The Station does not contain any cataloged museum objects.

13. Partnerships

The park has many partners which participate in the education, interpretation and resource protection responsibilities of the park. None of the alternatives would result in changes to the park's partnership programs.

14. Carrying Capacity

Carrying capacity is defined as "the supply, or prescribed number of appropriate visitor opportunities that would be accommodated in an area." Alternatives A, C and D would not increase the number of visitors; Alternative B could have a negligible increase in the number of visitors with no changes to the park's overall carrying capacity.

15. Social & Economic Environment

Under Social and Economic Environment, several sub-topics were dismissed as there would not be any detectable effects: future population growth/decline and economic environment including employment. Please see above for the related issue of Environmental Justice.

Also dismissed under this category are impacts related to regional open space, recreational resources and transportation and circulation.

16. Health & Safety Issues/Hazardous Materials

Lead paint is present on or within most of the Station structures. The park has recently secured funding to begin a lead paint abatement project for all the structures in the complex. Under this project all lead paint would be removed and disposed of in compliance with applicable laws, and the structures repainted. Since this project would occur under any of the alternatives and the results would be the same—remediation of lead paint from the site—this impact topic is dismissed from further evaluation.



Wild pony.